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Mrs Ruth Walton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Walton

Short inspection of Bexhill Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The leadership of Bexhill Academy is highly effective. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2018, you have led a dedicated and talented staff team to build further on the existing strengths of the school. Core values such as resilience and respect underpin all aspects of school life. Staff model these values through the strong relationships that they have with each other and with pupils. As a result, pupils talk maturely, and genuinely, about the importance of valuing one another and of celebrating the different cultures, races and backgrounds that make people who they are. One pupil said, 'We are all different. We might have different coloured eyes, hair or skin but we are all the same underneath. We all have bones and a brain and a heart. We should respect everyone.'

You and your staff value the challenge and support that working in a multi-academy trust provides. Your deputy headteacher and early years leader share their expertise by leading aspects of learning in other schools within the trust. You and your leadership team have productive working relationships with the

chief executive officer and the regional hub director. You ensure that you rise to the challenging targets and expectations that they set. In turn, leaders have high expectations of staff, teachers set challenging work for pupils and the pupils expect the best of themselves. As a result, the barriers and challenges that exist for some pupils are tackled so that good support helps pupils to be confident to learn. Ultimately, this enables pupils to achieve well.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Parents say that school staff are approachable and that communication between home and school is strong. They appreciate the caring and nurturing environment for pupils and the rich experiences that the wider curriculum offers.

Pupils share parents' positive views of the quality of the curriculum. They talk enthusiastically about outdoor learning, science experiments, physical activities and educational visits. Pupils state that teachers make their learning 'challenging but fun' which, they say, is why they love their learning. Pupils are immensely proud of their school. They take on roles such as class monitors, playtime buddies, house captains or school councillors with commitment and responsibility. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour around school, and in lessons, is excellent.

You, and leaders before you, have focused your work on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Inspectors asked you to raise pupils' attainment, especially in writing. Together with the English leader, you have established effective systems to check that spelling is taught systematically and that pupils have sufficient opportunities to apply their writing skills in all subjects. Teachers have developed their skills in teaching writing through high-quality support from the English leader. As a result, all teachers adopt a consistent approach to writing where pupils are taught how to judge the success of their own writing and how they can improve it further. Ultimately, this has led to high attainment in writing for all groups of pupils across the school. Work in books shows that many pupils make exceptional progress in writing, often from low starting points.

The previous inspection also identified the need for leaders to work closely with parents to improve pupils' attendance. This has been a stubborn issue. Over time, pupils' attendance rates, including for those frequently absent from school, have been worse than the national average. Therefore, this was an area to explore during this inspection.

The local governing body is responsible for the strategic development of the school. They work closely and effectively with the trustees of the academy, being clear about the different roles and responsibilities that they hold. Governors have been proactive and carried out an audit of the various strengths and range of skills that they bring to the strategic leadership of the school. They use these skills to challenge and support you and your leaders at an appropriate level. This then enables them to check carefully on all aspects of the school's performance.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Together with your deputy safeguarding leaders, you make sure that the culture of safeguarding has a high priority. Staff access up-to-date and regular training and are vigilant in their reporting of concerns. Leaders act on these immediately, working closely with external professionals to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the timely support they need to stay safe. Governors check frequently to ensure that you adhere to correct safeguarding procedures.

Staff teach pupils about how to stay safe in and outside of school. As a result, pupils are knowledgeable on how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare, and that they are confident staff would put a stop to any instances of bullying that might occur. Parents who gave their views during the inspection agree, stating they have no concerns about bullying. They feel that their children are safe in school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils enter early years with skills below, and for some children, significantly below, those typical for their age. By the end of key stage 1 and 2 the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been above the national average over time. However, in 2018 outcomes in reading and mathematics were broadly in line with national averages. I spent time considering the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in lessons and books with you and your deputy headteacher. We agreed that the high quality of teaching and learning over time is a significant strength of the school.
- There are many strengths in how reading is taught. Pupils get off to a strong start in learning their letters and sounds because your leader of phonics ensures a systematic approach and dedicated teaching time. Pupils in the early stages of reading have books that are matched to their phonic knowledge. This means that they are able to read all of the words accurately, which builds their confidence. This is helping pupils in key stage 1 to become fluent in their reading. The proportion of pupils currently in Year 2 who are working at the expected standard in reading is above last year's national average. This represents strong progress for pupils by the end of key stage 1.
- Mathematics is also taught well. The leader for mathematics ensures that teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Adults have strong subject knowledge and use questioning proficiently to check on how effectively pupils understand what they are learning. Teachers model mathematical methods skilfully, giving pupils time to practise the method with the adult, then independently. This is supporting pupils in developing their mathematical fluency and reasoning skills. Teaching assistants provide targeted and timely support within lessons. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are given opportunities to use reasoning to explain their answers and to consolidate their mathematical knowledge through a

problem-solving approach. The proportion of pupils currently in Year 2 who are working at the expected standard in mathematics is above last year's national average.

- By the end of Year 6 in 2018, attainment of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was below average. Their progress across key stage 2 was above average for mathematics, but in the average range for reading and writing. I wanted to see how well you and your staff provide for this group of pupils. You have established a strong culture of inclusion within the school which enables pupils to access the same opportunities as other pupils. Teachers are skilful at adapting or matching learning tasks appropriately, to meet pupils' needs. Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons, including practical resources. Work in books shows that current pupils with SEND make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Since September, you have established structured systems to work closely with families whose children are frequently absent. The decisive actions and tenacious approach taken by you and the child and family liaison officer have led to improved attendance for pupils currently in school, compared to the same period last year. The overall attendance of current pupils is broadly average. The proportion of current pupils who are persistently absent has also reduced and is an improvement on last year's national average. You strongly discourage parents from taking their children on holidays during term time. However, parents continue to do so and term-time holidays contribute significantly to pupils' fluctuating attendance rates. You are determined to work with individual families to further improve this issue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance rates continue to improve, particularly by working with parents to reduce the number of term-time holidays.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, senior leaders and members of the governing body. Together with you, or your deputy

headteacher, I made visits to classrooms to observe pupils learning. During these lessons, I spoke with pupils and looked at their books. I spoke with pupils when I observed behaviour at breaktime and met formally with pupils from Years 1 to 6. I heard five pupils read. I looked at a sample of pupils' English and mathematics books across a range of ages and abilities. I looked at a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, pupils' attainment, progress and attendance. I also considered the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan. I checked on the school's recruitment and induction procedures for staff and volunteers. I met with the chief executive officer and the regional hub director from Wise Academies. I spoke with parents and carers at the beginning of the school day to gather their views. I also considered four responses to Parent View, two responses to the Ofsted free-text service and a written letter from a carer.